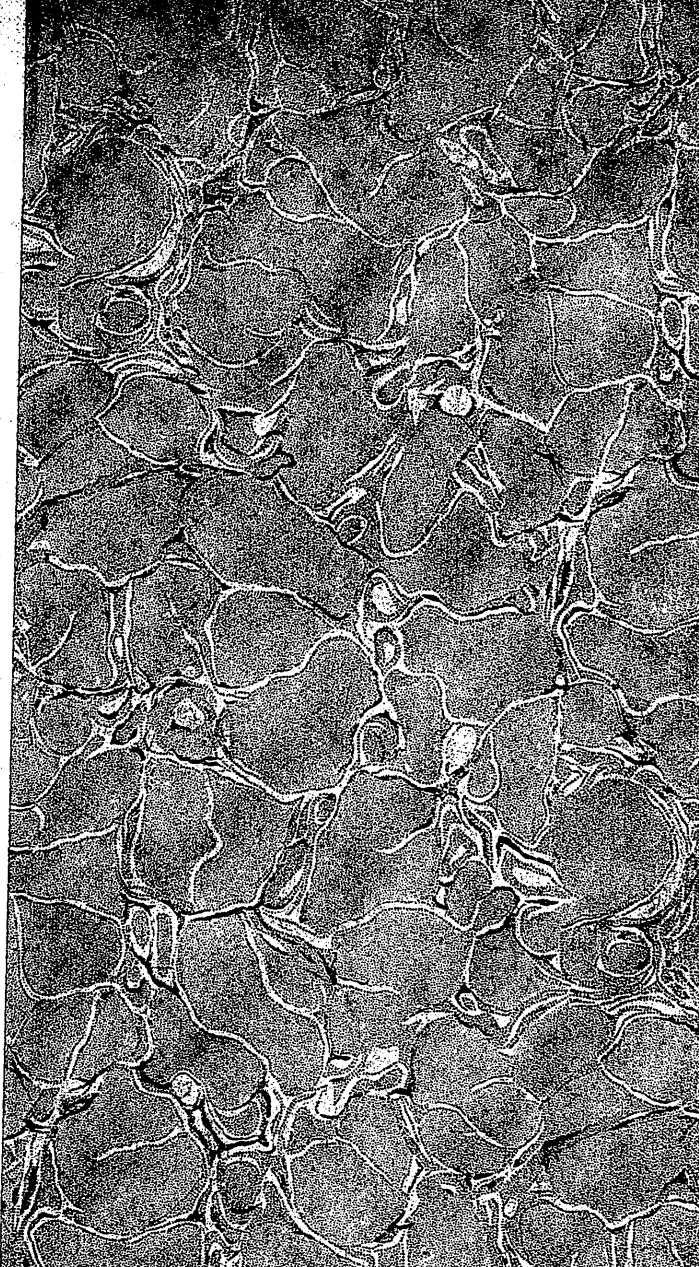




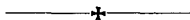
Walker

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# FALSE IDEAS OF GOD.



## Three Sermons

PREACHED IN THE

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HARTFORD

BY

GEO. LEON WALKER,

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PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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THESE three sermons, successively preached in the ordinary course of pulpit duty on the 23d and 30th of January, and the 13th of February of the current year, were suggested by questions arising in the Pastor's Bible-Class on the First Article of the Church's Creed.

Prepared without the least thought of any further use than a single oral delivery, they are now, at the request of the hearers, somewhat reluctantly yielded to publication, and affectionately inscribed to the congregation of the First Church and Society,

BY THEIR PASTOR.

February 20, 1881.



## SERMON.

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PSALMS 50: 21.—Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.

WE are told on the strong authority of Holy Writ that it is the error of the fool to say in his "heart there is no God." It is the practically equivalent error of many who would be astonished at not being thought wise that they have a God of their own imaginings. And this error has been by far the more prevalent one. The denial of a God has been local and individual; false conceptions of God constitute a large part of the history of religions.

He who asserts there is no God may always be convicted of folly and generally of affectation. He whose conception of God is harmonious with Nature and Revelation is the exceptional man in our religious communities.

It would be very interesting, did time allow of any such undertaking, to pass in review some of the chief forms in which a belief of God has been held by different peoples of the world, and to see how they have been modified, if not almost originated, by the peculiar character or circumstances of the nations which have held them.

Still more interesting would it be, perhaps, to trace the fact that there has been no religion in the world, whose conception of God, however extravagant or abhorrent, has not



been bottomed on some real, though it may be terribly perverted, truth of the divine character.

But such lines of enquiry as these would lead us into wide regions, remote from the practical uses of our Sabbath hour. My object is humbler, perhaps; certainly more personal and utilitarian.

I propose, as opportunity shall offer, to call your attention, in perhaps three discourses, to certain false ideas of God which have prevalence, not in some other nation or age, but among ourselves. I wish to point out in reference to actual phases of current literature and individual experience, some erroneous conceptions of the Divine Being or Character which exist even in Christian communities.

And my purpose in doing this is not so much to correct, if that were possible, any speculative error, as to redress practical want.

The false views of which I speak are of different kinds, and relate, some of them, to the being of God, and some of them rather to his attributes and character; but in one way or another many are involved in them to their spiritual hurt.

Let me, then, as I may be able, turn your attention to the more significant and prevalent of these misconceptions of God as existing at the present time and to some extent among us.

And the particular false idea of God, to which on the present occasion I call your notice, is what may be called the *Mechanical Idea*.

The conception of God as a distant, inaccessible, almighty mechanist is a natural outgrowth of an era of awakened but partial scientific knowledge. A great multitude of eager scholars—greater than at any previous period of history—are devoted to the investigation of the natural laws of the

universe. They are turning the sharp light of curious enquiry into every nook and cranny of the ancient globe. The stony pages of geologic history are spread out and their records deciphered. The sepulchers in rock of old races of living creatures on the earth before man was made, are rifled of their remains to illustrate modern anatomy. Chemistry is unhappy till each particle of dust be resolved to its last analysis. Mathematics mutters her restless numbers, discontented till she has weighed and measured and proportioned all the elements of the sphere.

We doat on rocky glens which prate  
 About our planet's age ; each mossy stone  
 There symptomatic of some certain date.  
 Our springs no more leap gaily born alone  
 Of very joy ; but analyzed and known  
 Even to their bubbling ether, onward draw  
 Their way in tame obedience to their "law."

Each plant from 'neath its crumbling cap of earth  
 Looks out upon a life foredated, classed ;  
 No hint of novelty, dead ere its birth ;  
 And all the powers and modes which fill the vast  
 Of Life stand ranged in ranks of "causes," first to last.

Astronomy smelts the ores of the ground into visual lenses through which she peers into regions beyond imagination, and discovers that it is but partially true that the earth "hangeth upon nothing"; for she asserts it is suspended in the equipoise of millions on millions of attracting and repelling worlds, whose impalpable grasp holds it more firmly than buttresses of adamant.

Reversing her optic glass, Entomology delights to mock the boast of populous human continents by revealing myriads greater than theirs in the shaggy bark of a giant cactus in tropic woods or a fallen oak in New England forest. And

perhaps, pointing out the careful solicitude with which each minutest creature is made perfect in its kind, she scornfully insinuates that care so complete implies value almost as great; and suggests that high thoughts of man's relation to a Creator are made obviously pretentious by the consideration of Divinity even for insects. In vain is it to suggest the smallness of the subjects of her domain as an argument for greater human hopes. Entomology replies :

“Thou hast not gained a real hight,  
Nor art thou nearer to the light,  
Because the scale is infinite.”

Or, if you still urge the “dignity of man” as a justification of his hopes, Astronomy answers :

“Self-blinded are you by your pride,  
Look up through night, the world is wide.  
Think you this mould of hopes and fears  
Could find no statelier than his peers  
In yonder hundred million spheres ?”

And so speculation will go on. There is no corner of the universe sacred from the footsteps of physical enquiry. In vain does the round globe hug itself close. Like a sphere of glass it is to be read through and through.

Now, welcome to all this! Hail to every man that brings us a new fact! We are not of those who believe that the ultimate effect of knowledge will be to overthrow faith. We do not believe that the records of God, written in stony tables of the earth, or hung in astronomic laws of the heavens, rightly interpreted, will be found contradicting the records he has written in his Word. The more truly the facts of Nature are understood, the more accordant with the system of Grace will they appear. And when that final light of perfected Science shall arise, mingling its beams with perfected Faith,

I do not doubt that such clearness will strike through the ordered harmonies of creation, that every least fact will be seen to bear an inseparable relation to that greatest fact of the Incarnation and Atonement. I do not doubt that the Cross of Calvary will be seen to be the end to which all pre-Adamic ages have pointed, as well as all the years of human history ; and that the scheme of Redemption will be annotated by illustrative signs, from geologic beginnings and astronomic heights.

But meantime the fact is plain that the hitherto partial results of material investigation have produced in many quarters a spirit of scepticism. Undoubtedly, for a great class of earnest minds, the continual search for the Laws of the universe has blinded them to the Lawgiver. They have practically emptied the universe for themselves of everything but causes and effects. They seldom deny the existence of God ; but so universal and unbroken is the sway of Law, that they cannot think that he has any present concern with the world. There seems to be no place for him to come lovingly in and to bring himself into present contact with men and affairs.

And hence has arisen, which I must believe to be a most prevalent doubt ; a doubt of the possibility of any real relations with God ; of any utility in prayer, of any significance in the divine personal love. A Mechanical Idea of God displaces the idea of a living, present, responding Friend.

According to this idea God is a great world-architect ; the constructor of an elaborate and perfect system : so elaborate and perfect, indeed, that he has left himself nothing further to do in it. It is all so prearranged and preordained that He has quite shut himself out of it, and it is in vain to look to him for any help in our needs or sympathy in our sufferings.

God has made a system so complete that it needs his care no longer. Indeed, for him to interpose would be to break its regularity. He might just as well sleep, so far as we are concerned. He can do no more than pass the idle remainder of his eternity in watching the rolling of the bands and the clicking of the teeth of the revolving wheels. If a man pray, upon this hypothesis, he prays but to cause and effect. Thought becomes but a secretion of the brain, and piety but a kind of gymnastic exercise of the soul. Even upon the supposition that God should wish to put forth an immediate act for any purpose, he can hardly do it without the hazard of the whole scheme. He has left himself no chance of interposition except, perhaps, a miraculous one. He does not live in the world and through it, and interpenetrate it in every part by his Spirit. He only possibly comes in sometimes in some miraculous way, and we can hope for nothing from him except at some such miraculous moments; which, considering that, in the opinion of many, nothing that can be regarded as miracle has taken place for now some eighteen centuries, leaves us with but a small probability of ever knowing much about him.

And furthermore, upon this hypothesis, why should God ever wish to interfere? Does not such a wish imply some want of forethought in him? Else he would have seen the emergency he now desires to meet and would have provided for it beforehand. Either then—such is the conclusion arrived at—he is limited in his knowledge and power, or he does not interfere at all in human affairs. He is either not wise enough to get along without miracles, or if he be, then miracles are not necessary, and he does not employ them.

And so, before we are aware of it, the divine attestations of Christianity are all shown to be delusions. Christ never performed any miracles. Christianity itself, as a miraculous

interposition in the affairs of men, is quite irrational. All there is in the universe is but the preordained course of cause and effect. All we can do is but to await the evolution of them. If one of the effects is to make us good and happy—why, then, we shall be. If the contrary result of our sin and suffering is the effect of the system, then it will be useless for us to try to avoid them. It will do no good to cry unto God about it. He settled the whole matter long ago and will not interpose; and upon the hypothesis of his infinite wisdom, there is no reason why he should wish to interpose. The Infinite Mechanist sits lonely and supreme above his work, which grinds inexorably on, and carries some of us pleasurably upon the circuit of some flying joy, and mangles some of us within the joints of iron sorrows, according to the established working of the scheme.

Ah, my friends, this is no fictitious sketch. There are hundreds whose souls are mangled and torn by the relentless wheels of this cold and hopeless system. “No God to help, no God to hear,” is their agonized cry; all the more anguished because they, many of them, cannot escape the conviction that a God does exist who wrought once, and too effectually, but who now, they think, works no more. Why cry after God? The cry but goes out into that void where “endlessly implores the homeless prayer.”

Wails for the ages groping for the light ;  
 Faiths of the nations of a just To-be ;  
 Deeds of all heroes of the trodden Right  
 Haunt that abyss of null futility :  
 And empty Nothing rolls a silent sea  
 About the limits of man's narrow scope,  
 His past unknown, his future blank of hope.

Nor let us delude ourselves or wrong others, by supposing that we are free from all leaven of the same doubt. It inter-

penetrates the piety of the Church ; it paralyzes much of the energy of faith ; it debilitates the sinews of Christian effort.

Now what, for the Church's sake, what for the sake of thousands without the Church, is to be said or done ? To the former we may with partial justice say, "Go to your Bibles and see how God represents himself, as presently and livingly concerned in human affairs ; as a hearer of prayer, as a comforter of grief, as a forgiver of sins !" But to the majority of men, who do not profess to be resolved of doubts by a mere statement of the Bible, to what are they to be commended ?

Not, I reply, to narrow tirades against speculation ; not to mere denunciations of scientific investigations. Religion has suffered enough already, in the recoil of the human mind held in tension for years by some bigoted and unbiblical notion of ecclesiasticism, at last giving way before the accumulated pressure of God's truth in nature and reason. The unrepented sentence of the Inquisition pronounced on Galileo, condemning the Copernican theory of the universe as "philosophically false and formally heretical," being "altogether contrary to the holy and divine Scriptures," is a standing warning to Christendom to be careful about denying for human consistency's sake those truths of nature which science is revealing to men's sight.

Christianity in our years is coming into junctures which our fathers knew not. The problems of every age are its own. And one can as well arrest the orbic motions of the planets in their course as stay the inevitable march which bears on the banners of truth from point to point of conquest down through the ages. And Christianity can and must meet the wants of every age. We underrate and dishonor the power of God in Christianity when we shrink from the broadest and freest contact of it with all the facts of the world, gathered

from whatever source. In this is the divinity of Christianity, that it has power to reconcile all facts and vindicate itself as the harmony of all truth. If it have not divinity enough for this, it must go down. The salt there is in it will not save it, unless there be salt enough in it to save all the world beside.

It will not be expected that in the narrow limits of a discourse like this anything more than the briefest hints can be offered for meeting of that false conception of God which has now been pointed out. Our considerations would be blamably incomplete, however, did we not follow the suggestion of the error by a glance or two at its antidote.

I. I remark, then, as a kind of general consideration, important for us always to bear in mind in thinking of the relation of God to the universe he made and governs, this fact, *viz.*: We cannot prove that what we call "Time" has any relation to God's being or action. Possibly some of our perplexities on this subject arise from a forgetfulness of this fact. We live in time. We act under a condition of successiveness. We are apt to transfer this condition to God, and to suppose him to be limited in the same way; and hence, conceiving of him as having prearranged all things, we are perplexed to see how he can newly arrange them or touch them, any way but to disarrange.

But what if there is no such thing as what we call prearrangement with God? What if foreordination should in truth be only a human mode of conceiving of the divine action, necessitated by the finite range of our faculties, but having no real foundation in relation to God? God's being is eternal, and to an eternal Being it is possible that past and future are not applicable terms. Eternity with God may not be, as it must seem to us, an aggregation of periods of time. His eternity may be ignorant of tenses, save that everlasting



present tense in which he says, "I am that I am." If this be the case—I do not assert that it is, I only assert that no one can prove that it is not—then we fret ourselves over a perfectly idle question when we ask how God can prearrange to hear our prayers, for example; or how he provides beforehand for contingent events. The question really may not have any meaning outside our own brains. To God's eternity, which may be as Aquinas says "indivisible and altogether," the end of a thing may not be further off than the beginning. An event which to us is ages past may be to him as present, as an event which is to us ages to come. With him there may be no past to be remembered, no future to be provided for; but all things lie open at once and equally to his eye and his hand.

But, waiving this point, and treating the matter from another, I remark:

II. Christian philosophy will do well to abide by its old simple doctrine that a Law of operation is nothing whatever but the way wherein an Agent immediately operates. A law of nature, for example, is nothing conceivable but the mode wherein God works in what we call nature. Gravitation—what is it, apart from God? It has no existence. Gravitation is the name by which we denominate that power by which God holds the universe together. And so of every law. It is the mode wherein the present power of God is put forth. There is no such thing as a system of laws operant of themselves, their maker and upholder apart from them. The fall of a leaf from an autumn bough is in execution of no pre-established law wherewith God has now no connection, beyond the bare part of a spectator of the result. It is God whose living power immediately operates in that and in all things. Do you suggest that it is derogatory to God's greatness to

suppose him thus concerned in each event? I reply, is it less derogatory to suppose that millions of centuries ago he provided for that event's accomplishment, while yet when it really occurred his omniscience necessitated his taking notice of it, when at all times a mere notice and choice would have sufficed? By this true conception of Law, beautifully set forth by the great Hooker, and still more powerfully by our own greater Edwards, God still and always lives in his universe, nor does it exist in its smallest particle or its minutest moment apart from his vital and active presence.

But, if this conception of physical law be true, how immediately is God brought in contact with us! We are touched, if we look rightly at the matter, not so much by nature as by God. And cannot he who thus holds all things plastic in his hands move upon us and for us as he will? And is not the whole frame of things pliant to his every thought? Can God do less than we can? I toss a stone in my hand; I begin a motion of which I did not think an instant before, but one which puts into new conjunction particles of matter, and in a sense overcomes the very law of gravitation so far as that stone is concerned. Cannot God do as much? Cannot he originate an act at any moment, for what cause he pleases; and if for any cause for the cause of a prayer?

But, perhaps, it is objected that the idea of God's constant activity in his universe is opposed to the modern physical doctrine of the completeness of the forces of the universe; or, in other words, the doctrine that no additional force is to be admitted into the wholeness of existence. I answer, the objection does not apply to the case. No new force is supposed. I add no new force to those existing before when I toss a stone in the air. I only give altered direction to forces now existing. And so of God's action. If the doctrine of the wholeness of the forces of nature were much better estab-

lished than it is, still it could not be shown that the living, active presence of God in the universe at all impinges upon that doctrine. We require no new letters in our alphabet to write a new book—only new combinations of old letters. And so neither miracles nor special providences require the addition of new forces to those now working. Each does require a direction and collocation for a specific purpose, and that alone. The use of nature for God's great purposes of providence and grace is exactly analogous in principle to the use of nature by man.

But, after all, I am quite willing to confess that there are questions here which we cannot solve. Let them be frankly recognized. Let it moreover be pointed out that the difficulty in the way of a rational understanding how God can come in contact with us through nature is the very same old difficulty which has always confounded human reason respecting Divine sovereignty and man's freedom. There is use in seeing what a difficulty is, even if we cannot explain it; and there is particular use in seeing what it is in this case, for we are guided to a method of rebutting the evil consequences of a doubt which baffles our understanding. The old problem of predestination and free-will may well instruct us here. Why has that problem been of so little practical consequence in ruinously bewildering man? Not because reason has ever comprehended it, for no reason ever has; but because against the mere uncertainty and ignorance of reason consciousness has offered the positive affirmation of distinct and universal belief of human responsibility.

Just so here. If unable to see how God can come livingly in contact with us through the medium of a world which seems to move in ordered ways, we are at least able to fall back upon two sources of evidence that he nevertheless does.

III. Briefly, then, to touch upon these will conclude my discourse.

And one of these is the fact that universal conviction affirms that God does come personally in contact with us through the laws of the universe, and does modify his dealings with us according to our dealings with him. This I affirm to be the testimony of every man's conviction, when he gets a truthful expression from his soul; and precisely as clearly the conviction of the rationalist who affects to deny it, as of every one else. Mr. Hume found no great difficulty in arguing down his belief in God so long as he sat in his study. But as he went out on one June evening with his friend Andrew Fuller, beneath the blue and star-lighted heavens, he exclaimed, "O, Andrew, there is, there is a God!" And so philosophers and children are as one in a thousand conjunctions of life, when there rises up in view of some providential occurrence the irresistible conviction, God means me; He is dealing with me.

Here is a point upon which savages and sages may compare experiences, and in which neither can tell much that is new. The objects and occasions which excite this conviction in the breast of each may be different; but some circumstances at some time awaken it in every breast.

Unless, then, our very nature be a lie, unless it be an organic, living, palpitating falsehood, then the affirmations of our souls are true, and God does deal with us, and touch us, and answer us as we answer him. Unless this be so, we can have no assurance of anything. False in one point, our natures may be false in all. And unless their ultimate, instinctive, universal affirmations can be relied on, then there is stability nowhere, and "Earth's very base is stubble."

The other and last source of conviction of God's immediate

dealing with us, now to be mentioned, is the need of the heart to have it so.

We cannot believe that there are implanted in our souls any imperative and universal needs, without a provision for their supply. The contrary idea leads immediately to the denial of God's honesty. But here we have this instinctive need of our souls to maintain relations to an answering God. And, my friends, we have no need with a voice so clamorous as this sometimes is. You may not feel that need always, but you have felt it. There are junctures of trial, there are shocks of bereavement, there are hours of loss and remorse and desolation, when every man sometimes feels that unless God thinks upon him, cares for him, there is nothing left but despair.

And so general and so frequent are these experiences, and so strongly do men at all times rest on the conviction that such access to God is possible, that I think it not too much to affirm, if the opposite opinion really settled down upon men, and the assurance became definite and final that no intercourse between God and man could be, the agony of that unsatisfied need would drive the race to madness. There is not depravity enough in the world, though ten times multiplied, to make men rest in quietude if the last avenues of intercourse with God were to be utterly walled up. In the night of that practical atheism humanity would grope like blind Samson for the pillars of existence, willing to end in utter ruin a condition so hopeless and horrible. Vain would it be to offer the whole of earth to the hungry soul. Its anguished cry would be, "Take it back again. What is it all without my God? Give me back Him against whom I have sinned; Him even who will punish me for my sin; but shut me not up to utter Fatherlessness and night."

So spoke the heart of bewildered France when philosophers

had written on her churches, "There is no God;" and over her graveyards, "Death is an eternal sleep." Out of the gloom of that despair she arose and brought back again the tyranny she had discarded and the priesthood she had despised, simply because they offered her orphaned heart—with whatever else bad or good was connected with them—the priceless boon of a living God.

So will it be ever. God has made man for Himself—as even a pagan philosopher long ago said—and man will never be content till he finds a rest in his Maker.

The mechanical idea of God may disquiet many and prove the ruin of some. But Science will never install such a divinity in the throne of Infinite Sovereignty, or cause mankind to believe that such a divinity is theirs. And reverent and intelligent science does not make the attempt. More and more does a really intelligent Physical Philosophy recognize the accordancy of God's truth in nature and God's truth in his Holy Word. More and more does it seem possible and reasonable (by the verdict of both) that "the hairs of our head are all numbered," and that "not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Heavenly Father's notice." In this conviction we look forward to a time when Knowledge and Faith shall sit down in lasting peace together; when Ephraim shall not envy Jacob and Jacob shall not vex Ephraim. The hour is certain to arrive,—

When fast as Science marches on,  
And plants a firmer foot with every stride,  
And fronts with level eye the central sun,  
She bows with humble Faith her forehead's pride,  
And owns with her, more wise in loving more,  
'Tis well to know, but better to adore.

Then she whose lips are holy with God's Name,  
And she whose heart is holy with his Grace,  
Whose highest word is evermore the same,  
From mingled souls with mingling voice will raise  
Accordant notes of undistinguished praise—  
As cherub answering unto seraph sings,  
Wrapped in the glory of their folding wings.

## SERMON.

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ACTS xvii: 24, 25.—God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands as though he needed any thing; seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things.

My last Sabbath's sermon, it will be probably remembered, was on the Mechanical Idea of God. To-day, the false conception of God to which I ask your notice is that conception of God which appertains to the system known as Pantheism.

What then is Pantheism?

Lord Jeffrey likens Pantheism to a cloud; and certainly not inaptly. As a system of doctrine Pantheism has the intangibility, the changefulness, the vast and gloomy grandeur, and oftentimes the loveliness also of those shapes of vapor which pile themselves up the summer sky.

Pantheism professes to be a complete solution of all the facts of the universe. It speaks of a period inconceivably, perhaps infinitely, remote, when there existed—not God, not supreme intelligence and power, but when there existed the fundamental substance or potency of Being; containing, however, a law of development within itself, a law furthermore strictly involuntary and inevitable.

Ages on ages passed; no imagination can conjecture how many. This substance or germ of potency developed into myriads of actual existences, according to the inward law of



its own unconscious working. There was at first, however, and there is now, only one substance. That substance is everywhere identical and eternal. There is no such thing as creative intelligence operating on material nature from without; there is only a self-evolving power operating unconsciously from within. If countless worlds seem to populate immensity they are the outblossomings of this ever-working but unintelligent force. There is nothing new; there is only change of form. There is no real plurality in things; all is one, call that what you will—whether God or nature or man. There is no such thing as Maker apart from the thing made. There is no Creator or created. There is no God separate from the world. God is the universe and the universe is God. All is one thing; God is a part of it; you are a part of it.

Does there glimmer from the far outskirts of the universe a ray of light which Astronomy asserts to be a central sun, surrounded by its own system of planets, and seemingly a work of infinite power and design? Pantheism affirms it to be only a part of the One, the God, the All, engaged in the same blind struggle toward development. Do we speak of man? He, too, is but a link in the chain of an endless evolution. He is a trifling speck, a minute part, of the All which is God. He has no truly personal and separate being. He was never begun. He is an atom of the infinite unity. He is a bubble point, appearing a moment on the shoreless sea of fathomless being. He will vanish, and other shapes of being will follow him as the great whole of existence develops on and on forever.

It has all been progress. Things grow from less to greater; from worse to better; from the imperfect to the perfect, continually.

The great whole is more perfect now than it was once. For now, in us human beings, it begins for the first time to be

conscious of itself. Your intelligence and my intelligence, what is it? It is not really your intelligence or my intelligence at all. It is in fact only the beginning self-consciousness of God, the All, who now in us, who are a part of Him, first reaches the point where intelligence begins. In all this development heretofore, up to man, there has been no self-consciousness. But now, in us, God begins to feel as well as to be. Man is a developed form of the infinite Being. Man is God arrived at the stage of consciousness. You are God, or a portion of God. The only God there is is the developing universe. The only intelligence which can be ascribed to God is the intelligence arrived at in the human phase of that development.

God is thus the sum-total of being, from nothing up to man. And all things are still moving on. The All is growing up toward a perfection which we cannot imagine. Nothing can defeat, nothing can even affect, that progress.

In the language of one of the American disciples of this scheme: "Suppose God, suppose all worlds, suppose the Infinite whole reduced back again to a pallid float, it would not avail anything in the long run. It would surely fetch up again. A few more quadrillion of ages, a few more million leagues of cubic space, and it would be up just where it is now, and then go farther and farther."

Such, then, is Pantheism, and such is the idea of God which Pantheism presents. . .

And now, just at this point, some one may be disposed to arrest all further consideration of the matter with the enquiry, "Does this come under the category of prevalent false ideas? Is it not rather the notion of a very few speculative and rare minds only?" I answer, the Pantheistic view of God and the universe—though the philosophy and faith of millions of our race in some parts of the world—is fully adopted, doubtless, by comparatively few of our English

tongue, though it has been by some, and by some also of large ability and influence. But there can be no question that besides its intelligent adopters there are many others affected, perhaps more than they are themselves aware, by the philosophy and religion (if religion it can be called) which Pantheism presents. There is most distinctly recognizable at the present time a very positive trend and motion of speculative thought in this direction in Europe and America alike.

And beyond this—and still more to the point as bearing upon the theme of this brief series of discourses—the influence of the Pantheistic conception of God and the world is not by any means confined to those who embrace or even understand the doctrine. There are logical conclusions from Pantheism as a system, which are practically accepted by a great many, who do not perhaps know what the system is. It has results upon the problem of Sin, for example; upon the question of Atonement, of Retribution, of Holiness; which results are acquiesced in by numbers who do not accept or even think of the premises from which these results are drawn.

When, added to this, it is remarked that a flavor of Pantheism distils through a great deal of popular literature, and tinctures a hundred volumes in our libraries with its mild but insidious malaria, it certainly cannot be esteemed a distant or an unfrequently-encountered enemy.

It is not in the least degree likely that Alexander Pope ever accepted the intellectual system of Pantheism; but his "Universal Prayer" and his "Essay on Man" breathe, in many a strain, most suggestive reminders of that system. So, too, are frequent pages of Thomson and Wordsworth and Tennyson redolent of Pantheistic odors, though no one of course deems these authors Pantheists.

Something more than an "odor" of the system—its very

fume and exhalation rather—saturates the lines of an author nearer at hand ; one whom it is rather the fashion to call the foremost living intellect of America :

If the red slayer thinks he slays,  
Or if the slain thinks he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep and pass and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near,  
Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
The vanished gods to me appear,  
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;  
When me they fly I am the wings;  
I am the doubter and the doubt,  
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

It is certainly quite true, as the amiable and intelligent Robert Chambers says, “there is an immense amount of Pantheistic sentiment floating about in the poetry, criticism, theology, and even in the speculative thinking of the present age.” One of the most striking confirmations of this statement, as it respects the department of theology at least, is to be found in the first two of the “Scotch Sermons,” just published in the volume of that name. Most curious is it to see how, in the eloquent utterances of the devout Dr. Caird, the Pantheistic principle, barred out in definition, comes in in argument and illustration ; how, denied in proposition, it does nevertheless in feeling and sentiment pervade the whole body of these two interesting discourses.

I turn, then, without apology, to a glance at one or two aspects only of the Pantheistic scheme, and these belonging entirely to its religious rather than its philosophic side, which

may suggest, partially at least, the secret of its fascination, the hidings of its power.

I. And one feature presented by the Pantheistic view of God and the universe, very attractive to many minds, is the wide and tolerant spirit it seems to foster.

Regarding all events of life, all phases of thought, all forms of religion, as points in an endless development from worse to better, Pantheism appears to have no motive to ignore any fact or to combat any creed. Everything is good in its place; the best possible in its place. All old religions, Fetish, Polytheistic, Judaic, were good religions in their time. It was well when men worshiped stones; it was only progressively somewhat better when they worshiped the Hebrew's Divinity. The All, which is the God, had reached in each case alike that point of development which made such worship, in both cases, a true spiritual expression.

Thus large and hospitable, it finds a place of equal honor for all the gods men have ever imagined. It erects a new spiritual Pantheon, and enthrones in it all the world's divinities in impartial reverence.

There are—to use a slight license with Milton's language—there are,

“Peor and Baalim  
From out their temples dim,  
And that twice-battered God of Palestine;  
And moonèd Ashtaroth,  
Heaven's queen and mother both,  
There sits full girt with tapers holy shrine;  
The Libyc Hammon lifts his horn,  
And Tyrian maids their wounded Thamouz mourn.”

There is sullen Moloch and brutish Anubis and good Osiris and beautiful Apollo. There are Ormuzd and Arih-

man, the warring divinities of Persia, and Brahma of the Hindoos, and Wodin of the Scandinavians, and Mexitli of the Aztecs, and Kiehtan of the North American Indians, and Jehovah of the Israelites. For the boast of Pantheism is Catholicity. Its doctrine is, whatever is, is right, and whatever was, was right for the time. Hence it is ready to concede to Christianity a claim to be one of the religions of the world, nay, one of the best ones, since one of the latest in the endless progress of things. But the religion? The positive and authoritative faith for man? Oh no, not that! There is no positive religion. There is no absolute and final truth. All religions are right in their season, as particular styles of clothing are adapted to varying seasons of the year.

And here Pantheism reaches the limit of its supposed tolerant spirit. It tolerates anything which only claims to be relatively true, and allows that to-morrow it may be antiquated. But it tolerates nothing which claims to be universal and everlasting truth. As the Roman Emperors could erect in their temples, statues and monuments for all the ugly divinities of the nations they conquered, and excepted only from their liberal charity the followers of Christ, so Pantheism can give place to all the faiths of the past, and can reject only the faith of Him who said "I am the truth," "I am *the* way," "No man cometh but by me."

This is a claim Pantheism cannot abide. As an absolute religion Christianity is rejected with scorn: only as a relative, transitory, and now somewhat antiquated and exploded form of religious belief, is it to be tolerated at all.

Still we can easily see that some minds can find a good deal of fascination, in these days of professed liberality, in a doctrine which claims to be ample and catholic enough to hold all religions in equal and impartial esteem.

II. Another feature of the Pantheistic system, and one which commends it to the reception of many, is the supposed ease with which it solves some of the hard problems of life and destiny: problems which other religions are declared to complicate. And one of these problems is the question of Sin.

Sin, upon the Pantheistic hypothesis, does not exist at all. It cannot belong to what we call the individual, for the individual has no real existence apart from the great whole. It cannot appertain to the All either, for that is wholly involuntary and necessitated in its progress on from change to change. There may be imperfections, but sin is an absurdity. To be sin there must be freedom, but there is none. And as for man, he has no real personality wherewith to act as an agent moral and accountable. He could not possibly be other than he is. His perfection, in fact, is just a development outward of what is within.

Of course, too, there is no such thing as virtue. What we call so is the evolution of something beautiful indeed, but necessary, and only as the organic unfolding of an inevitable progress. Personal responsibility is thus only a form of speech: a kind of accommodation to partial views of truth. And individual immortality apart from the immortality of the great whole of things is a delusion.

Now without drawing out any more at length these points of the Pantheistic scheme, we see enough of it to vindicate what I said sometime ago about the influence of this doctrine in quarters where it is not positively professed. It is a grand leavening idea in a great deal of current literature. The easy way with which it seems to deal with many old and troublesome questions of human nature commends, if not its principles, at least its temper and conclusions to many. Is sin then, as Pantheism affirms, nothing sinful, only a kind of

necessary infirmity? Why, then, we shall agree with a late distinguished Boston preacher in his somewhat celebrated paragraph, wherein he expresses the hope and the belief that all men alike, Judas with his bag; the kidnappers of slaves; the reeking inhabitants of brothels and dram-shops, are on their sure way of moral progress upward toward loveliness and purity.

Is there no such thing as voluntary action? Then we shall join with that oracle, who from the Autocracy of the Breakfast table aspires apparently to the Autocracy of Theology, in his definition of sin as the daughter of ignorance and not of depraved and willful knowledge. Is responsibility nothing? Then we shall no longer wonder at the flabby and debilitated condition in which the perusal of many writings of the "Sage of Concord" leaves us. We shall be ready to join with him in recognizing as the ultimate saying of wisdom—not as said the old oracle: "know thyself," for perhaps self-knowledge might disclose something to ruffle one's self-complacency—but: "Be thyself! Act out thyself; that is the only perfection of man." Is distinct and enduring personality a dream? Then we shall be ready, like the followers of Compté, and like the amiable and intellectual Miss Martineau only a few months ago, to commend ourselves at death into the embrace of the great weltering whole of things; expecting to be individually existent thereafter only in the brief memories of a few, who themselves will soon subside in the grand total of being.

And now, pausing an instant at this point, it is instructive to notice how ancient and modern speculation alike—once admitting how covertly soever the Pantheistic hypothesis—drop at last into the same bottomless abyss. Hindooism went into the gulf thousands of years ago. And no acuteness or practicability of the Western intellect saves from the same plunge. Many a Brahminical hymn out of old Vedas, centuries on



centuries sung on Indian soil, would harmoniously accompany the prelections of not a few German professors, and English and American lecturers to-day. Ducking to one another in that weltering abyss, Brahma and Spinoza, Hegel and Martineau, we will leave them behind, while we briefly inquire how the Pantheistic view of God and man is, in a simple manner, refuted by a sound and Christian philosophy.

I. And first the Pantheistic conception of God is refuted by the evidence of intelligent design and pre-arrangement in the universe.

Pantheism denies the existence of a final cause. A forecast purpose toward which all things are intelligently directed, is a conception disallowed by the system. It only recognizes an unconscious and necessitated development according to an inward and inevitable law.

But against this violent and almost unintelligible hypothesis almost every fact in the universe seems to cry out. If nature has a voice to utter anything, it is just this which she seems to declare,—that every item of her being, from the smallest crystal fashioned in darkness at the mountain's heart, up to the ordered equipoise of the astronomic worlds, must be the result, not of unintelligent development, but of intelligent design. She recognizes in all the tokens—not of a passive, huge, unconscious life diffused through all, and identical in all—but tokens rather of a mind and a will which exists before, above, and apart from all. Doubtless nature shows that the mind of God has, in a true sense, represented itself in the universe—even as an author's mind represents itself in his book. But with equal clearness does she affirm that the mind of God, as well as the mind of the author, must be something above and separate from his work.

The complex accordancies of the solar heights, the subtle

affinities of chemical forces, the ordered changes of the seasons, the innumerable adaptations of the world to man and man to the world, the infinitely manifold devices and felicities in the construction of the human form,—these things no proof of anticipation and intelligent purpose! these things only the effect of unconscious development, the aimless, dreamy unfoldings of the single primordial characterless substance growing to the All! Why, every grass-blade confutes the theory! The mechanical forethought implied in the growth of a single hair overthrows it.

I have read of an eminent surgeon—a bitter denier of an intelligent First Cause—in the course of his lectures coming to the examination of the structure and functions of the human eye. As he pointed out, holding the dissected organ in his hand, the delicate adaptations of the parts to their use, and showed how manifold were the conditions which must accurately conspire to the possibility of vision, struck with the irresistible proof of forethought and contrivance, he slashed the mute demonstrator of his folly to pieces with his scalpel, and broke out in his rage, “Gentlemen, there is a God, but I hate him.”

With equal irresistibility of proof might each fact of nature—were it but the turning of but a finger’s subtle hinge—lead us to the humbler and more reverent recognition of a wisdom which exists before and apart from all things, and who made all things in the fulfillment of a distinct and recognitive purpose.

II. But again: The Pantheistic view is refuted by the consciousness every man possesses of his own individuality. The doctrine of Pantheism is that there is no such thing as individual existence. All things are but parts of one. Unity and identity of substance is the fundamental principle of the system.

Now if there be anywhere in the universe one thing, only one, which can be shown to be not to be a part of anything else, but a thing by itself, then this doctrine is disproved. For it allows no exceptions. It asserts without limitation the "All is one." Now we reply, the consciousness of every man affirms that he is just that separate object. He is precisely that individual and unparticipated entity. Consciousness knows nothing of the submerging of personality which Pantheism affirms. It asserts the direct opposite. It knows that it is not God, and no part of him. It knows that it is not any other man, or any part of him. It asserts its own simple individuality of being. Sometimes, indeed, it may wish it were not so. Sometimes the pressure of individual destinies may make one long, if it were possible, by mingling one's self with others, to divide the tremendous weight. Love may sometimes prompt it,

"To lean o'er self's sharp verge with asking moan,  
And long to lose itself in life more dear."

But it cannot do it. It moves, amid millions kindred to it, still alone, and can never by the breadth of a hair overpass the boundaries of its own definite personality. This, I say, is consciousness. Unless consciousness be a lie, Pantheism is false. Pantheism can only be accepted by a denial of the affirmations of consciousness, or by turning a deaf ear to the affirmations she utters.

And there is this further to be observed, that just in proportion to the clearness of this affirmation of our own personality, does the idea of personality other than our own—and most of all a divine personality—rise also, in rebuttal of the Pantheistic view. The recognition of a personality which is ours, is not probably in point of time separable from recognition of personality not ours. The sense of self demands

as its complement the sense of not-self. The soul attaining self-consciousness is conscious also of another-self; of a self, moreover, on which it depends, and to which it stands in terms of instinctive relationship. Consciousness testifies, that is, of one's own personality, and discerns in that indivisible instant the personality also of God. In both actions alike, it repudiates the Pantheistic view.

III. I have time left me but for one more point. I select from several which I could wish to touch upon, that one which comes closest to the practical evil which the Pantheistic view most develops and fosters among us.

The sense of sin disproves the pantheistic hypothesis.

We have seen that Pantheism denies the existence of anything which can be called sin. There is, at worst, only guiltless imperfection. The great whole of things which has struggled blindly up from the formless jelly, or less than that, in which it began, has not yet arrived, probably never will arrive at absolute and perfect development, and until it does there will be imperfection, weakness, unripeness, but not sin. That is absurd.

Now, against all such ingenious speculations, I set over a simple, universal, awful fact. Men everywhere, and of all grades, and in all ages, have had—if they have had anything—a sense of personal sin. What imperfection is they know, but that is not what they have felt, but sin. It would in truth be a mighty relief to men, could they persuade themselves that what their conscience accuses them of is the blameless result of a necessary limitation in their faculties. And some, I suppose, do succeed, for a time at least—not in making conscience say something different, but in putting such an interpretation on the voice, or in turning attention away from it, as permits them to repose. But this voice

itself, what does it say? What is the secret of the restless efforts of men to quiet or to change its utterances by the acceptance of intellectual schemes which—like the one we are considering to-day—are at war at once with reason and with experience? Why is it that the advocates of anti-Christian views have any occasion to speak against what they call the “priestly inventions of religion” as interfering with the true progress—as they think of it—of society and of reason? Why is it that professors of Christianity must unite with the opponents of it in deploring the abject submission of men almost every year to some new form of superstitious delusion? Now Mormonism, reducing hundreds and thousands of civilized Americans to servitude to a corrupt and knavish oligarchy; now Spiritualism, fumbling and harking in the dark about the legs of tables and chairs; now Romanism, giving custody of soul and eternal hope over to the keeping of other men, whose souls and hopes are in the same jeopardy? What explains all this?

I tell you there is only one old and new solution of it all. It is the sense of sin; sin inextricably woven into the fibers of the whole being. Guilt, not imperfection, but guilt, cleaving like leprosy to the soul, this explains what we see. And because we are restless under the fever of this disease, but do not dare to look our danger in the face; because we wish to get rid of our trouble, but do not wish to take the Gospel means, it is that we are given over to these miserable delusions. The sense of sin, individual, universal, pervasive, explains the disquiet of men. But this sense of sin—so general, so many-formed in its manifestation, so various in the expedients to which it drives men—is, if it is nothing else, a standing protest against the Pantheistic doctrine of God and man. For the recognition of sin carries with it something yet beyond. The sense of sin has for its inseparable

companion the sense of responsibility. The consciousness of guilt carries with it the consciousness of accountableness. But accountableness to whom? Why, accountableness to what a personal being can alone be accountable to, to a personality like but above its own—the personality, that is, of One upon whom it depends, before whom it is ashamed, whose jurisdiction over it it recognizes, and at whose holiness it is afraid. The sense of sin is the sense also of holiness; the recognition of responsibility is the recognition also of God. And both visions alike are disproofs of the Pantheistic doctrine. That doctrine can only be accepted at the expense of such a denial of the affirmation of universal consciousness as reduces certainties to shadows, and leaves no foundation for belief anywhere.

To conclude my already sufficiently extended discourse.

I spoke in commencement of the likeness of Pantheism to a cloud. We see now more clearly the justice of the similitude. Wearied sometimes by the hardships of this workday earth on which we toil, we have all of us perhaps looked up occasionally to the bright and beautiful shapes which float into our vision in the summer skies. For a moment we would be transported to regions so bright and fair. But nearer drawn the illusion dies. Changeeful, damp, impalpable, empty of life, they are at the mercy of every wind, and darken to utter blackness in the fading day.

So the scheme of Pantheism, at a distance specious and beautiful, professing to solve so many of the enigmas of life, at a nearer hand is seen to be dreary and hollow; its empty and heartless and iron progressions oppress us with gloom; its denial of our personality of being insults our hope; its negation of a living, loving God chills us in lonely despair. We turn away from it for refuge. We escape from its fogs and its dreams to greet again the serene sky of God's provi-

dence above us; to cast ourselves anew upon a Father who careth for us, and to feel once more that our souls within us are our own, and by divine grace may be blessedly our own in salvation and purity forever.

## SERMON.

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REVELATION IV, 8.—“And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him ; and they were full of eyes within ; and they rest not day and night saying, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

On two previous occasions we have considered—first the Mechanical, and second the Pantheistic idea of God.

I invite you at the present time to a few moments contemplation of a third erroneous conception of God, different somewhat in its origin from either of the others, and more prevalent, perhaps, than they are among us. This erroneous conception I shall call the Sentimental idea of God.

This sentimental conception of the Divine Being springs neither as does the mechanical idea from a scientific habit of mind, nor as does the Pantheistic view from a tendency to speculative philosophy. Its origin seems to be rather in the emotional part of our nature ; and the view itself appears to be mainly the product of the fancy and the sensibilities of men. It is undoubtedly true that as soon as the mind of man embraces an idea of God, characteristically springing from any one of the three different sources which have been indicated, it will immediately and quite unconsciously lay all parts of our nature under contribution to the support of that particular view which it adopts. So that any of these three different ideas soon comes to address itself to man's entire nature, and enlists in its behalf almost all the energies of the



understanding. Still I do not think it useless to discriminate, as I have attempted to do, the origin of these erroneous ideas; and to assign each to the appropriate department of the human mind or feeling in which it naturally finds its origin or support.

Let us pass then to a brief observation of some features of which I have called a Sentimental view of God, and of man's relations to him. The observation of these will be followed, as on previous occasions, by suggestions toward the disproof and confutation of the error contained in them.

I. And one very marked feature of that conception of God which I call a sentimental one, is a disposition to merge all Biblical representations of his character in some one particularly gentle or acceptable representation. Take, as an example; the disposition to sink all representations of God in the single representation of Fatherhood. God has, in a gracious condescension to the narrow power of our finite understandings, set himself forth to us under various figures and names, so to help us in the better comprehension of himself. One of these aspects, for example, is that of the divine Fatherhood. Sweet and benign representation! Never let us lose sight of it! Indicated in many a tender passage of Old Testament writ, it is reserved for the New Testament to elaborate and emphasize the delineation. Especially is it the charm of many an utterance of Christ himself, that they set forth in vivid and attractive clearness this Fatherly conception of God.

But in the full and many voiced language of inspiration this is by no means the only conception presented to us. There are others. There are many others. I do not say or intimate that there is a single one among them all inconsistent with that conception which sets God before us as the Father of men. But I do say there are representations which

present aspects of the character and dealing of that heavenly Father of us all, which do not, and were not intended to set before us that particular range of sentiments which the idea of Fatherliness in its softer and more limited meaning in itself suggests; but others which we believe to be just as essential as those are to any right view of him. Prominent, for example, among these representations which he makes of himself, are those which set him forth as an infinite Sovereign; as a righteous moral Ruler, as a just and holy Lawgiver of the universe. This whole range of representations, wherein God sets himself before us in royal, judicial, and righteous authority surely means something. They are representations which pervade the whole Bible. Numerically speaking, they outnumber by far any others. Estimated in the light of nature and Providence they are weighty and significant as any which can be conceived. I call it a sentimental view of God, which forgets them. And yet by many in our day they seem well nigh to be forgotten. The manifold, august, and majestic aspects in which God brings himself before us, are by some narrowed down and pinfolded within a single one. And some people call this "breadth." It is "broader," apparently in their view to have one idea than two. It is "broader" to hold a single point of revelation, than many points. And so it comes about that a sentimental conception of the infinite being, which almost sinks out of view his character as a righteous moral ruler of the universe, has great acceptance among us.

Ah! my hearers, there was a breadth and compass of intellectual and moral understanding in the old Hebrew Prophets, in the Apostles of the New Testament; in the great theological thinkers of the grand periods of church history, and in the Fathers of our own New England, which hardly characterizes some of the present delineators of religion in

our time. There was something in the wide and sturdy make of their heroic souls which enabled them to understand the declarations of revelation in a comprehensive way, and which disposed them to the belief that the Bible and Providence meant just what they seemed to mean. They had not learned the modern secret of being "broad" by cutting off all phases of truth but one. And about none of their views was there a more robust and sinewy comprehensiveness than in their conceptions of the grandeur of God's law and the height of God's holiness. I want to speak with the utmost reverence when I say it amounted to something to be God in their view. It was not an empty matter that there was a God who promulgated moral laws. It was a thing of some consequence that every creature who came into the universe was suspended in the links of righteous rule. God had his rights as well as man. All the privileges of the universe had not yet been given over to mankind.

But now shall I at all overstate the truth if I say that with a very large portion of modern religious society, such views are almost denied? Are not notions current all around us which go far to empty God's government of everything which entitles it to the name? notions which fail to recognize in God hardly any attributes beyond those which make him a kind of good-natured onlooker in human affairs? The right of God to impose, the justice of God to execute laws in the actual control and government of men—these are practically ignored, if not literally denied. Instead of this we hear of a God whose chief function seems to be to overlook the infractions of a law he has no inclination to execute. We hear much of such a Fatherhood, as, were it exemplified in an earthly parent, would be inadequate to the insurrection of the youngest member of a household. Instead of a God who will, as the Scriptures say, "by no means clear the

guilty," we have a Deity of uncontrollable instincts of forgiveness. A hazy platitude of benevolence takes the place of a righteous moral administrator.

Of course, in his relations to such a being, man needs no atonement, or not much of an atonement, for violated law. When such miscellaneous emotion goes out to all men, they will want no Daysman of mediation, no divine avenue of approach. Expiation of sin—expiation by sacrifice, is an idea, I will not say too majestically divine, but too severely noble for such a scheme. It will be well enough to have a good example set to men; a powerful persuasion put before them; but as for a sacrifice of propitiation, that is not needed. God is too accommodating for any such necessity as that.

II. Closely connected with the loss of the idea of spiritual Law which we have spoken of, is this further trait of the sentimental view of God, the absence of a dominating sense of God's Holiness. This, too, brings into view a point of the subject wherein the thoughts of the Bible and of some of the Bible's expounders in other days, contrast strangely with what appear to be now the feelings of many.

Listen to the voice which reverberates through Scripture and through the great periods of Christian history! What is it? The greatness of God? True it is incomprehensible! The mercy of God? Assuredly it is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him! The wisdom of God? O the depth, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and his ways past finding out! But the Holiness of God! Ah, that is the ground tone of that reverberating voice! The Holiness of God! That is the aspect of the Divine character which brought Prophets and Psalmists, Reformers and Pilgrims,

soonest to their knees! That is the glass wherein they saw clearest their own characters, and admired most the Divine.

The cry about the Throne, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty," well expresses, in its three-fold ascription of Righteousness to the Infinite One, the priority, above all considerations of almighty power, of almighty Holiness. That was the note which sounded deepest and vibrated longest in those sturdy souls, who knew no fear but the fear of sin and the fear of God.

But how is it now? I hold it to be one trait of the large prevalence of a purely sentimental conception of God, that this Biblical and historic view of his character is so comparatively displaced by secondary, and relatively incidental ones. Almost any view of his character is put forward rather than that conception of infinite holiness which the Bible presents, and the great epoch-makers of religious thought recognized, as the central trait of his whole being. Sometimes it is God's wisdom which swallows up all other conceptions. Oftener it is what is called His "goodness,"—a goodness, however, so indiscriminate and unconsidering that it might more appropriately be called good-nature, rather than that majestic benevolence over which the grand minds of all ages have rejoiced.

But when once this conception of holiness, as the grand, central attribute of God's character, is in any way bedimmed by the intrusion into the foreground of any other conception—whether it be good-nature or pity—we may look at once for a great change to pass over the whole question of man's relations to God also. And this is just what we do find.

I said that looking through the glass of the divine holiness, the great seers of Biblical and Christian history had perceived with the utmost clearness the fact of man's depravity. But when the use of this glass is persistently refused;

when the lens which is brought to bear upon man is an indiscriminating benevolence, for example, we shall not wonder if other views of human character prevail. It will be only what we ought to expect to find, that the sentimental conception of God results in a sentimental conception of man. Man is, most likely, no longer a creature inherently sinful. It belies the dignity of his nature to call him a being radically and originally corrupt. The splendor of his endowments reveal him, rather, the heir to almost angelic dignities, to which he needs to be educated and gently persuaded, indeed, but to gain which he needs no radical change. By the might of lofty example he is to be wooed; but by no new life of God in the soul needs he to be born again. He requires only to summer in the light of moral truth and natural beauty, to be and come out well.

And then the rights of so splendid a creature as this! Not well is it for any being in the universe, not even God, to trespass upon them! Not well to threaten against such a creature as this the endless endurance of Divine displeasure. In such a case as that, we should look to see the tyrant Governor quail before the glance of violated right, and his sceptre tremble in his hands. And thus the sentimental conception of man makes him practically the center of things; elevates him above all which can strictly be called punitive in the divine government, and leaves it to appear in the upshot that to be God at all is a very small matter indeed.

Now I am quite sure no thoughtful observer of the days now passing by us, can fail to see tokens of the sentimentalism which has now been spoken of. This diminished sense of moral law; this exaggerated feeling of human privilege; this belittled conception of God's righteous claim; this blown-up assertion of man's rights; this strange reversal of

orders and magnitudes and values in the spiritual realm, may be seen all about us.

Sometimes the manifestation takes on curiously grotesque and offensive shapes—as when a maudlin sympathy for a criminal almost seems to blot out any remembrance of the crime. As, for example, when a midnight murderer like Chastine Cox spends the days between his sentence and the scaffold, in a bower of bouquets, presented by female hands: or when in old Puritan Connecticut newspapers gush with tenderness and women's hearts with floral offerings to a Hamlin under a similar legal condemnation.

Analogous to this, though not indeed so obvious or offensive, is the disposition in many quarters to charge about all the guilt of intemperance on the seller of intoxicating liquors, while the drinker of them is coddled and wept over as a helpless "victim." These are indeed very gross shapes of sentimentalism. In milder forms it spreads wide and poisons far. It leavens the utterances of an immense portion of the literature of our time, with weak views of moral claims and powerful palliations of guilt. It casts a glamour of excuse and apology over the sins of great authors and prominent statesmen. It tones down the sharp utterances of conscience and the word of God. It makes many a professed gospel pulpit preach quite another gospel than Paul preached or Christ witnessed to by his arduous life and his sacrificial death. It discourages the setting forth of the strong fundamental rock-ribbed truths of God's word; stigmatizing them as odious "dogmas" and "formulated creed statements"—as if all truth was not doctrine; and as if any truth could be put into intelligent language without its being in that very act formulated. It goes with tripping steps dry-shod over the deepest problems down which the great minds of past ages and the sad hearts of all ages have cast the sounding-line of

agonized enquiry ; simpering, meanwhile, soft platitudes about a religion which is a "life" and not a "theory," an "experience" and not a "theology." It spreads over the whole horizon a rose-tinted atmosphere of quietude and good nature and promise; and lulls men with optimistic lullabys of progress and welfare.

Now all this is well enough if it is true. It is a great deal pleasanter to say smooth things than rough things, if the facts justify one in saying them.

But how are the facts? That is the important inquiry. What do the order of nature, and the course of providence, and the word of God indicate to be the facts? That is more to the point than any conjectures of the imagination, or longings of sentiment. I ask you to turn with me, a few moments, to consider whether the sentimental view of God and man is borne out by the realities of the case.

I. Begin then with the small end of the problem. Begin with man. What is the view which Nature—that great original ordinance of God—takes of the moral quality of man? And I remark that the obvious natural circumstances by which man is surrounded on the mere physical plane of his being, are a very significant indication that his Creator looks upon him as a constitutional infractor of law. Man's original position in this world is a position hedged about by limitations and checks, and penalties. His whole physical existence is conditioned on every side by inexorable laws. If he transgresses one of these laws, the retribution follows—a fever, a broken limb, or whatever the exact recompense may be, appropriate to the particular disobedience. The very frame-work and order of nature seem a matchlessly-contrived system for the repression and retribution of wrong-doing.

Why do we find man subjected to that primal law: "In



the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread," when the earth might just as easily have been made to bring forth spontaneously all that was needed for human comfort? Why does there lurk in almost every physical enjoyment a man can feel, a sting which, if the delight is hugged too closely to the breast, inevitably turns the joy to misery. Why is every force of nature—even the gentle dews of night-fall, and the floating airs of summer, as well as storms and ocean-billows, commissioned with a power, which if exercised, is fatal to man's existence? Why hangs there over him the perpetual uncertainty of the hour of that absolutely certain event which will end his life? Why are the bounds allotted to his existence here so brief, instead of being prolonged to a thousand years? What is the meaning of these bristling limitations and guards—only a few out of hundreds of which I have hinted at, which everywhere surround man and hedge him in at every turn? These are important questions, my friends, and they arise from the most cursory view of man's condition. They stand out on the surface of affairs. It is a most inadequate reply to call these things the necessary limitations of man's being. We can see that many of them are not inherently necessary. They are too significant in character to leave any doubt of their meaning! They point too uniformly in one direction to allow us to mistake their design. They show that they are placed as checks and guards about a creature liable to transgress. They are sentinels who keep everlasting watch about one who is not safely left to his liberty.

And, O my hearers, what a tremendously indicative fact this is,—this watchfulness and suspicion with which mute nature and physical circumstances surround man on every side! Can it mean anything else than that man is a being accustomed to transgression? Does it not show that He, who made the order of things which so watches and restrains

him, made it for discipline and, if need be, restraint? A certain range of freedom man has indeed; but once he steps across that bound, and not a pebble or a leaf but becomes a policeman's club to drive him back again or to slay him for his temerity. The earth is crowded full of forces in ambush, ready to start out upon him, and daunt him again within his appointed bounds.

As Scott's Lowland knight saw, at the blast of his Highland foe, the whole quiet landscape alive with an enemy before invisible, so does the lawless tresspasser on the divinely-prescribed conditions of man's existence find an avenging angel at every turn.

“Instant, through copse and heath, arose  
Bonnets and spears and bended bows;  
On right, on left, above, below,  
Sprung up at once the lurking foe;  
From shingles grey their lauces start,  
The bracken bush sends forth the dart,  
The rushes and the willow wand  
Are bristling into axe and brand,  
And every tuft of broom gives life  
To plaided warrior armed for strife.  
That whistle garrisoned the glen  
At once with full five hundred men.”

Something like this is the experience of man in this world. Not far can he go in any direction; not eagerly can he pursue any course to which he is naturally inclined, but he comes across some law, at the touch of whose secret spring he is thrown back upon himself bleeding and torn. Again I ask, what is the meaning of this, if man be not regarded as a being likely to transgress; needing to be guarded? Is not the wisdom manifested in these subtle contrivances fraught with precisely the same lesson as the wisdom manifested in the appointment of your Wethersfields and Sing Sings, for violations of human law? Stately the edifice may be; artis-

tic and ingenious the arrangement of its windows and doors, its locks and bars, but it is art and ingenuity whose ultimate purpose is always in view, the discipline and guardianship of those who will abuse liberty. And analogously so, with infinitely wiser adaptation, do all the appointments of man's physical and social condition conspire to testify that he is a sinful creature; that He who put him here knows he is such, treats him as such, and has prepared the world for him with that feature of his character distinctly in view. So that rationally interpreted the facts of external nature only are a significant indication that man is, to the center, a transgressor.

And now I ask—as the point bearing on our theme—what is the light which this sheds upon the character of God? Does it show him to be indifferent to Law? Does it reveal to us the easy good-nature of such a benevolent platitude as many represent God to be? Or does it rather discover to us a Being vigilantly and persistently on the watch to prevent, or if that cannot be, to retribute, evil. Surely there is no indifference here. Surely we read in such facts as I have indicated, an intenser meaning in the Divine declaration that God is a “jealous God” and will by “no means clear the guilty.”

II. I remark, again, the view of God thus gained from the external circumstances of man, is confirmed by the conviction which arises in his own breast. Conscience affirms the same thing.

I do not at all question that a man may so exclusively dwell upon some other conception of God than that which is afforded by the simple voice of conscience, that that voice shall be almost drowned. It is in this way, I believe, that the sentimental notions of God we are considering arise. It is from quite other sources than what conscience affirms, that we get the idea of Divine benevolence. The idea of forgive-

ness, of deliverance from the consequences of sin, is no utterance of that voice which God has placed in the soul to be a witness to Himself. If there be such deliverance we must gain the knowledge of it somewhere else than in this whisper in the breast. For the whole significance of this fact of conscience seems to be exhausted in asserting two things: first, the holiness of that Being to whom man is subject, and, secondly, the strictness of that law to which he is amenable. The holiness of God is the original and absolute utterance of the conscience. This faculty, in itself considered, is ignorant of any other conception of God than a holy God. It knows nothing about benevolence, mercy, or indifference to evil as characteristics of the Divine Being. Strictly regarded its only view of him is of a Being of infinite and absolute purity and holiness; a holiness so absolute as to preclude the possibility of the slightest indifference to the least sin; or of the exercise of any other conceivable attribute of his character, except in the exactest consistency with this. In vain do you say God is benevolent; conscience affirms it is not possible for him to manifest benevolence, unless he can do it in accordance with the demands of holiness. Useless is it to insinuate to this faculty of the soul that God is not strict to mark iniquity; conscience suffers no equivocation, but replies, "It is impossible he should not be strict to the uttermost, for he is holy."

With equal clearness does conscience affirm the intense reality of that law to which man is subjected. Coupled with its assertion of the holiness of God, is its distinct declaration that in view of the demands of that holiness, every man is a transgressor. Here again there is no equivocation. Every man by this faculty is shut up to the distinct consciousness of being a violator of law. This is not the witness of a Christian

conscience alone; it is the testimony of this faculty, as a universal one in the human breast. The holiness of the moral Ruler and the certainty of his conducting his administration on the basis of a respect to that attribute are matters about which, from this department of the soul at least, comes no uncertain sound. See how it has floated down to us across the gulf of twenty-three centuries from the lips of the heathen dramatist *Æschylus*:

“ Who does these deeds  
Will find no refuge from his guilt in Hades ;  
For Hades underneath the ground  
A strict examiner is found ;  
And all the deeds of mortal kind  
He sees and writes them in his mind.”

No, we have here no idiosyncrasy of a particular nation or time. We have a universal fact. A fact of human consciousness which affirms at once the absolute and jealous holiness of God, and the certainty of his having invariable reference to his law in all his dealings with men.

Now to apply this to our subject. We have here certain distinct and absolute asseverations of consciousness. They cannot be doubted and anything be sure. Whatever other conceptions of God we have, therefore—and Revelation may impart many others—must harmonize with these fundamental ones. But these are palpably contradictory to those sentimental conceptions of Him which this discourse handles. They bear no manner of consent with them. These primary asseverations of our souls give the explicit denial to the soft and romantic notions we are considering. Like iron engines they push through the fine fretwork of man's imagination of himself as a guiltless demi-god, and of God as a careless, good-natured admirer of him, and relentlessly crowd him to his true position as a guilty transgressor against a God of spotless holiness.

You ask, do they not equally demolish all hope in the mercy of God, even through Redemption? Yes, I answer, assuredly they do, unless in that plan of redemption the fullest provision be made to manifest the holiness of God, and to vindicate the justice of the law. Such a provision we believe there is. This is the ground of our reception of Christ as a divine sacrifice of atonement. We receive him as such because we feel no less would do. We accept the great fact of an Incarnate Redemption, because it harmonizes with, and not at all contradicts, these primary asseverations of our souls—the holiness of God and the inviolable sanctity of his law. No view can be correct which does not recognize these in the intensest degree and fullest extent. And because the sentimental conception of God does not clearly recognize or provide for them, it is, before the truth of these voices of our deepest souls, as the chaff which the wind driveth away.

My discourse has already been too long; but justice to my subject requires me briefly to touch upon two points in conclusion.

It is frequently charged upon us by those who advocate what I have called sentimental views of God and of man's relation to him, that our conception of man's character is a belittling and dishonoring one. We are told that it is degrading to man to call so noble a creature depraved. A "broader" view of what is due to the nobility of human nature would prevent, it is said, any such estimates of mankind. But I answer, utterly the opposite is the truth upon this matter. Grant to the uttermost the guiltiness of man's character in his depraved estrangement from God, still there is no conception of the greatness of man so imposingly solemn as is gained through the very fact of his sin. The view which recognizes man as ruined, as utterly hostile to God by nature,

is the broadest, albeit it is the saddest, view which can possibly be taken of him. It recognizes him as a being free enough to sin. Free enough, that is, to set himself up in opposition to an infinite God; to stand out in a position of hostility to Omnipotence; to measure himself at least for a moment with that Power before which all things are but vanity. How terribly great must that nature be which can propose to itself so awful a course!

Great enough to be ruined by this course, too, is man seen to be in this view. Great enough to have had infinite interests at stake and to have lost them. Great enough to have been well nigh an angel, and to be an angel fallen. Noble and great enough to have been a wondrous creature of power and beauty; great and noble enough to be now a splendid ruin. By the depth of the loss into which he is plunged do we gain the best conception of the height of that glory from which he has fallen. By the melancholy desolations of his ruined and dishonored powers do we gain the truest idea of their stately and original grandeur. Oh! it is this true conception of God and of man, which I have endeavored to set over and against the falsity of the sentimental one, which casts the most clear yet the most lurid light on the greatness of man. He is great enough to be lost, yet great also enough to be found; great enough to be saved, but great enough also to be damned.

Again and lastly: It is often urged by the advocates of the views I have opposed, that the conception of God and of man which I have suggested instead, is a narrow and frigid one; gives no play to the finer sensibilities; is inconsistent with a large culture and advanced civilization. But such assertions receive no countenance from the historic record of the influence of the doctrine so impugned. Where it has been received human culture has in all ages been widest and

most generous. It has been the inspiration of poetry, the incentive to philosophy, the life of the loftiest philanthropy. It has taken the deepest hold upon the wills and the imaginations of men, of any doctrine ever promulgated in our world. And it has done this precisely because of the breadth of its appeal to all the capacities of man's being. It addresses these in their completeness. It leaves none unsatisfied. To the nobler and sterner virtues it is the source of a more than Spartan strength; to the gentler and more yielding sensibilities it affords the truest occupation and soundest culture. What human emotion is there which finds not its broadest development in the conception of God and of man's relations to him, which I have suggested in opposition to the sentimental one?

We retort the objection! We affirm it is the sentimental view which is belittling. Its appeal is alone to the weaker of the sensibilities. Its effeminacy is one of its marks of falsity.

"Narrowing to human reason!" "Inconsistent with a wide cultivation!" How contrary the truth! Would you ask for conceptions of lofty justice? Look for them in that majesty of law which sacrificed an Incarnate God in vindication of the just. Will you awaken in yourselves ideas of mercy and of love? Gain them by contemplating redeeming compassion. Will you ask for motives to heroic self-denial? Find them strewn everywhere through the life of heaven's exiled Prince, who had not where to lay his head. All that there is of hope or fear; all that is possible to human thought of glory or of shame; all that can enter the soul with mightiest power to lift to virtue or restrain from sin, is parcel and substance of this true and gospel conception of God and his way with men.

Honor, gratitude, hope, devotion, faith—what noble emo-



tion is there but is called forth in widest development by this view of God from Creation to the Cross, and thence onward to the Judgment.

And of man—what element is wanting to the grandeur of his destiny, contemplated thus in his passage from eternity to eternity? Glory is pale before such an exaltation as sonship to God. Joy is faint at the far-off radiance of heavenly blessedness; tragedy is dumb at the wail of a soul forever lost; and all the manifold capacities of the heart and mind are exhausted and overwhelmed in the wonder that surrounds the meanest child of a fallen yet a ransomed race, on whom awaits a crown of glory or a vast mystery of woe.

To this God of Mercy and of Holiness let us seek. In that Mercy let us trust; before that Holiness let us bow. "O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee. . . . Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne. Mercy and truth shall go before Thy face. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance."



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